Candid Camera

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, February 01, 2010

Photo radar helps augment traffic safety, as well as that of pedestrians and neighborhoods. A tweaking of the current policy to improve safety will not cost the state any money, and in fact will raise money while at the same time lowering emergency room health care costs. Speeding cars in our neighborhoods continue to remain an issue. The City of San Jose does what it can to manage speeding on our streets with the dollars we are able to allocate.

The City deals with speeders cars in two ways. One is enforcement with our Traffic Enforcement Unit (TEU). TEU are police officers on motorcycles that split their time in neighborhood "hot spots" where speeding is reported. **You can report speeding in your neighborhood by clicking this link.**

The SJPD aggregates the complaints and then tries to prioritize them as a way to identify the hot spots. The other portion of traffic enforcement's time is spent at intersections with the highest rate of car accidents. Of course, as pointed out last week on my blog, we only have a limited number of police officers covering a city of a million people.

The other City tool is our Department of Transportation (DOT), which has a small but dedicated group committed to traffic calming who work with a limited budget and are mandated to follow state law. The state determines signage, street markings and the actual speed limit on San Jose streets.

San Jose previously had photo radar: a van parked on streets that took pictures of car license plates that were speeding. However, due to issues at the state level, the program was eliminated. Data from the DOT showed that photo radar reduced speeding on neighborhood streets. Gov. Schwarzenegger has recently proposed an expansion of photo radar.

Drivers who speed are dangerous. Time and time again we have a tragedy of some innocent pedestrian getting killed by an irresponsible

driver. Currently, red light running cameras are legal in California; the idea is to also allow that same camera to give out speeding tickets. There is also speculation of allowing mid-block radar as well.

If you believe speeding is a problem in your neighborhood **please contact your state representative this week** and tell them you support the expansion of photo radar.

Police cannot be on every street 24/7, but technology can help fill the gap. We need our limited police resources for actions that only a police officer can do like investigating violent crime, property crime, gangs and community policing.

On to other matters: On Friday, we released the mid-year budget review. We had less revenue than expected so we drained $4.5 million out of our $10 million economic uncertainty reserve. **You may remember an October 2009 blog** when a Lobbyist came to the council meeting lambasting the City to spend the reserve instead of saving the money. Individuals are told by financial planners to save six months of living expenses in case of unemployment, so our City, having a one percent reserve is the minimum and should be higher. Going forward we will have $5.5 million left out of an approximate billion dollar budget.

Also worth noting from the report was the annual Hayes Mansion subsidy from the city was $5.9 million which is equivalent to approximately 50 police officers or approximately 40 police officers and opening all of our libraries citywide on Sundays. Take your pick.

Finally our Building & Structure Construction Tax decreased 50 percent—from $8 million to $4 million. It's important to note that affordable housing in San Jose is exempt from paying these fees that go towards the paving roads. As market rate housing is in the tank the only housing going forward are affordable housing projects that sadly do not provide parks either, again an exemption made by the city council. Think of that next time you buy new shocks or tires for your car.

The City of San Jose Budget Prioritization Survey, available by clicking this link, closes Feb 5.

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